

Rapa language

Rapa (or *Rapan*, autonym *Reo Rapa* or *Reo Oparo*) is the language of Rapa, in the Austral Islands of French Polynesia. It is an East Central Polynesian language, along with the Marquesic and Tahitic languages. There are three versions on the Rapa language currently being spoken: Old Rapa, Reo Rapa and New Rapa.^[3] Old Rapa has been mostly replaced by Reo Rapa, a mix of the more commonly spoken Tahitian and Old Rapa.^[4] New Rapa is commonly spoken by middle-aged and younger speakers.^[5] Rapa is a critically endangered language, and there are only around 300 speakers of Reo Rapa, with only 15% of them able to speak Old Rapa.^[6]

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Varieties

There are three versions on the Rapa language currently being spoken: Old Rapa, Reo Rapa and New Rapa.^[3] Old Rapa is the indigenous form of Rapa. Reo Rapa as a language was created, not simply by incorporating lexical terms from Tahitian to Old Rapa, but from bilingualism and language shift due to the dominance of Tahitian. While Reo Rapa is a mix of Tahitian and Old Rapa, speakers can generally tell if the words they are speaking is sourced from Tahitian or Old Rapa due to phonemes absent in one language and present in the other. Based on the phonological form, speakers of Reo Rapa are aware that certain words they speak belong to Old Rapa or Tahitian.^[7] For instance, velar nasal sounds such as /ng/ and velar stop sounds like /k/ are not present in Tahitian but are in Old Rapa.^[8]

Reo Rapa is not a koine language, where the language is created due to interaction between two groups speaking mutually intelligible languages.^[9] Contact between Old Rapa and Tahitian speakers was indirect and never prolonged, violating a requirement to be called a koine language. Reo Rapa was the result of a completely monolingual community that shifted as a whole to the more dominant Tahitian Language, thus creating a bilingual community, which eventually created Reo Rapa.^[9] Therefore, it is crucial to note that Reo Rapa should not be confused with the Rapa Nui language. The language is sufficiently different from the rest of the Austral languages to be considered a separate language.^[10]

New Rapa is a form or variety of Reo Rapa starting to be used by people under 50 as an attempt by the younger generation on Rapa Iti to reverse the language shift to the Tahitian Language. New Rapa is different from Reo Rapa because speakers can definitively tell which words originated from Old Rapa and which from Tahitian. In New Rapa, the Tahitian elements are phonologically modified as an attempt to create words that sound more similar to Old Rapa instead of Tahitian. In order to be called a "true local" Rapa speaker, the newer generation are modifying the Reo Rapa language so that it sounds less like Tahitian and more like Old Rapa.^[11]

The most commonly variety on the island of Rapa Iti is Reo Rapa. It was created from a culmination of Tahitian and Old Rapa and was developed due to language shift. However, this shift has stopped and from it a shift-break language has occurred known as the New Rapa. New Rapa is a variety of Reo Rapa and it illustrates the attempt to reverse the shift to

Rapa	
Reo Rapa; Reo Oparo	
Native to	French Polynesia
Native speakers	300 (2007) ^[1]
Language family	<div>Austronesian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Malayo-Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Oceanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Eastern Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Central Eastern<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rapa</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	ray
Glottolog	rapa1245 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/rapa1245) ^[2]

the Tahitian language.^[3]

History

The loss of the indigenous Old Rapa began with an enormous population decrease due to disease brought by foreigners (mainly Europeans). Within the span of five years the population decreased by 75%. By 1867 the population was down to 120 residents from its estimated original of two thousand. This made the island of Rapa Iti susceptible to outside influences.^[3] Of the islands of French Polynesia, Tahiti had become a large influence and had become a filter for Western influence, so before anything entered the islands it would have to pass through Tahiti. Being the powerful influence it was, its ways of religion, education, and government were easily adopted by the people of Rapa Iti, and the language of Tahiti followed.^[3] The language we know as Reo Rapa was not created by the combination of two languages but through the introduction of Tahitian to the Rapa monolingual community. Reo Rapa is not a completely different language from Old Rapa or Tahitian but more of a creole. Old Rapa words are still used for the grammar and structure of the sentence or phrase but most common context words were replaced by Tahitian.^[12]

Old Rapa is considered to be endangered.^{[3][13]} It has few speakers and the only people who speak Old Rapa proficiently, as of 2015, are in their 60s.^[3] The language is considered to be poorly documented. The oldest published documentation of Old Rapa dates back to 1864, a short word list compiled by James L. Green under the London Missionary Society.^[14] The most comprehensive study of the language is the 1930 5-volume unpublished manuscript by John F.G. Stokes. There is also a more recent 2006 unpublished lexicon, put together by Tomite Reo Rapa, which was used to later write a book published in 2008. The book, Ghasarian and Make (2008), was the product of the work of the Swiss ethnologist, Ghasarian and a Rapa elder, Alfred Make.^[15]

Phonology of Old Rapa

Consonant Phonemes of Old Rapa^[5]

	<u>Bilabial</u>	<u>Labiodental</u>	<u>Dental</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Postalveolar</u>	<u>Retroflex</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Plosive</u>	p		t				k	ʔ
<u>Nasal</u>	m					ɳ	ŋ	
<u>Fricative</u>		v						
<u>Tap or Flap</u>						ɾ		

Similar to other languages that fall within the Eastern Polynesian language family, the consonant phoneme inventory of Old Rapa is relatively small. Consisting of only nine distinct consonants, Old Rapa is constructed of eight voiceless phonemes and one voiced phoneme.

Of the nine phonemes, four are a result of a Stop - /p/, /t/, /k/, and /ʔ/. While /p/ is constantly bilabial and /t/ is dento-alveolar, the place where /k/ is articulated can range anywhere from pre-velar to uvular. When spoken, the place of articulation of /k/ depends on the succeeding vowel segment. Mary Walworth uses the following examples to demonstrate these differing occurrences:

- Before a high-fronted [i]: in the word kite ‘know’, /k/ is pre-velar
- Before a mid-fronted [e]: in the word kete ‘basket’, /k/ is velar
- Before a low-back [ɑ]: in the word karakua ‘parent’, /k/ is distinguishably more backed
- Before a mid-back [o]: in the word komo ‘sleep’, /k/ is uvular

The alveolar and post-alveolar stops, while distinguishable in the linguistic study of Old Rapa, are often misinterpreted as the phoneme /k/ to native speakers. This observation was noted multiple times in Walworth’s conversations with native speakers; for example, the difference between Tākate and Kākake was not perceived by the native speaker.

In the study of velar stops, there are instances in which lenition, the weakened articulation of a consonant, occurs. In the first case, the velar stop /k/ transitions more into a velar fricative when placed in the unstressed syllables. In Walworth’s example in the word kōta’e ‘water’, the /k/ phoneme is pronounced as [k]; however in the word eipoko ‘head’, the /k/ is

pronounced as [x]. The second case is very similar to the first, but on a “phrase-level”. In this sense, when placed in a word that is not stressed, lenition occurs.

When referring to the Rapa usage of the phoneme /r/, there is a distinct difference between the alveolar tap and a trill. When pronounced in words where it is located at the beginning of the stressed syllable, the alveolar tap becomes better defined as a trill. The usage of this phoneme and its variants is evident in the Walworth’s examples:

Examples where a trill is perceived:

- /rapa/ ‘name of island’ > [ˈra.pa]
- /roki/ ‘taro-bed’ > [ˈro.xi]
- /ra:kau/ ‘plant-life’ > [ˈra:.xao]

Examples where a tap is retained:

- /karakua/ ‘parent’ > [ka. r a. ˈku.a]
- /ʔare/ ‘house’ > [ˈʔa. r e]
- /taratika/ ‘ridge’ > [ta. r a. ˈti.xa]

While currently indeterminable, it is plausible that in Old Rapa the /r/ phoneme existed closer resembling the lateral approximate /l/. In an article published by John Stokes in 1955, what is now taken to be the /r/ phoneme was approximated to be mix between, “a clear l as in English and soft r.” However, Walworth states that even in the oldest of her consultants, there was no recollection of the /l/ phoneme, leading her to make the assumption that the /r/ phoneme has come about as a result of the Tahitian influence.

When observing the usage of the labiodental fricative /v/, the shift period away from Old Rapa becomes more evident. In the older generations of native speakers, this phoneme is articulated more like that of the labiodental approximant ʋ. The usage of the labiodental fricative is almost always used by the newer generations of native speakers, whereas the approximant is almost never used. This change is directly attributed to the Tahitian influence of the labiodental fricative.^[5]

Grammar

Reo Rapa preserves the grammar and sentence structure from Old Rapa, with notable influences from Tahitian in the form of common content words. The grammar structure of Reo Rapa is of an SVO language created through the introduction of a widely spoken Tahitian to a monolingual Rapa community. The language is considered to be a creole language with grammar, traditional words, and sentence structure to be made up of Old Rapa while common context words are similar to, if not outright identical to Tahitian.^[12] Some examples of Reo Rapa grammar are shown below.

▪ **Perfective TAM** (Tense - Aspect - Mood) /ka/

- *ka rahi¹⁷ para te taofe*
 - ka (Perfective Aspect) + *rahi¹⁷* (Much) + *para* (Ripe) + *te* (Article) + *taofe* (coffee)
 - ‘Some coffee was really ripe.’^[16]

▪ **Definite word** /tō/

- *e hina’aro na vau tō mei’a ra*
 - e (Imperfective Aspect) + *hina’aro* (like) + *na* (Deictic) + *vau* (Singular) + *tō* (Definitive) + *mei’a* (Banana) + *ra*(Deixis)
 - ‘I would like those you bananas (you mentioned).’^[16]

▪ **Question words**

- /a’a/ (What)
- /’ea/ (Where)
- /a’ea/ (When)

- /nā 'ea/ (How)
- /'ia/ (How many)
 - ex. *e a'a tō-koe huru*
 - *e* (Imperfective Aspect) + *a'a* (What) + *tō-koe* (Article)(Possessive marker [o])-(Plural) + *huru* (state)
 - 'How are you' (literal translation - 'What is your state?')^[16]
- **Past negative** /ki'ere/
 - *ki'ere vau i haere i te fare*
 - *ki'ere* (Negative) + *vau* (Singular) + *i* (Prefective Aspect)) + *haere* (Go) + *i* (Prepositional) + *te* (Article) + *fare*(House)
 - 'I did not go to a house'^[16]
- **Non-past negative** (Regular negative) /kāre/
 - *kāre tā-koe puta*
 - *kāre* (Negative) + *tā-koe* (Article)(Possive marker [a])-(Plural) + *puta* (book)
 - 'You don't have your book.' (Literal translation - 'your book doesn't exist')^[16]
- **Adverbial** /ake/
 - *me rahi ake teie eika i*
 - *me* (Thing) + *rahi* (Big) + *ake* (Complement word, Adverbial) + *teie* (Demonstrative) + *eika* (Fish) + *i* (Prepositional)
 - 'This fish is bigger than my fish the other day'^[16]

While Old Rapa contributes a majority of Reo Rapa grammar words, some are taken from the Tahitian language as well such as the negative words, 'aita and 'eiaha. While 'aita is used as a simple "no" in Reo Rapa, 'eiaha is used to add a negative to a sentence to change a positive "yes" sentence to a negative "no" sentence.

- **Negative particle** /'eiaha/
 - 'eiaha 'a haere mai i tō-ku fare
 - 'eiaha (Negative particle) + 'a (Imperfective mood ~ (A command or request)) + haere (Go) + mai (Evidential) + i (Preposition) + tō-ku (Grammar article (Prefix/Suffix) + Possessive + Grammatical Patient + Singular) + fare (House)

Vocabulary

Like most Polynesian languages, Reo Rapa shares close ties with other Polynesian languages like Tahitian and Old Rapa. Tahitian played a major part in its influence for the creation of modern terms within the Reo Rapa language whilst Old Rapa contributed most of the traditional/cultural vocabulary. However this influence did not affect preexisting terms as heavily.^[17] Below are two language charts comparing some common words and basic numerals within the Reo Rapa language and contrasting the similarities to the languages which have influence it the most.

Numerical Comparison ^[18]					Common Words ^[18]				
					Word	Tahitian	Old Rapa	Reo Rapa	% similarity
					come/go	haere	naku	haere	61%
					eat	'amu	kai	kai	70%*
					parent	metua	karakua	metua	70%
					brother	tu'āne	tungāne	tu'āne	86%
					sister	tuahine	tua'ine	tuahine	86%
					grandparent	rū'au	'ina'ina	'ina'ina	72%
					sky	ra'i	rangi	ra'i	72%*
					day	mahana	ao	mahana	75%*
					sun	rā	pake	pake	81%
					moon, month	'āva'e	kāvake	'āva'e	100%
					fresh water	vai	kōta'e	kōta'e	100%
					river	'ānāvai	mangavai	mangavai	98%
					sea water	miti	kara	miti	100%
					<u>taro</u>	taro	mīkaka	mīkaka	100%
					tear (n)	roimata	karavai	karavai	92%
					name	i'oa	eingoa	eingoa	100%
					mountain	mou'a	mounga	mou'a	81%
					hill	'āivi	taratika	taratika	83%
					talk	paraparau	'akaero	paraparau	72%

Notes

1. Rapa (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/ray/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Old Rapa" (<http://glottolog.org/source/languoid/id/rapa1245>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Walworth 2015
4. Walworth 2017, pp. 89, 99
5. Walworth 2015
6. Walworth, Mary (2014). "Rapa" (<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/5330>). *Endangered Languages*. Retrieved February 2, 2017.
7. Walworth 2017, pp. 120
8. Walworth 2017, pp. 105
9. Walworth 2017, pp. 121, 122
10. Charpentier & François 2015
11. Walworth 2017, pp. 124
12. Walworth 2017, pp. 119
13. The language is classed by Ethnologue as a "Shifting Language"
14. Walworth 2015, pp. 33
15. Walworth 2015, pp. 34
16. Walworth 2017, pp. 111, 112
17. Walworth 2017, pp. 100

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External links

- Box of 283 index cards of plant and animal names from Australs Island including local language archived with Kaipuleohone
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